

studio moves from Hollywood to Orem



John Ahern, seated, and Grenade Curran, look over some stills from "Thundarr" series at a desk which originally was in the Walt Disney studio. Animators are now in Orem.

Department of Cinematic Arts at BYU. They feel that so many animators and others with artistic abilities have come out of the Provo school and established themselves at Disney that the precedent has been set. They would especially like to establish facilities for teaching beginning and advanced animation at BYU.

Ahern and Curran have the same extensive backgrounds in many aspects of entertainment. Not only that, but their parents made their marks in various aspects of motion picture and television activity.

Ahern's father, Jack H. Ahern, was in many productions with Lucille Ball. He was a set decorator for many of her shows. He also did set decorations for such productions as "The Yearling," "In Cold Blood" and "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea."

Curran's father, Charles, was a cameraman at RKO Pictures. His mother, Marion, was a scenic painter for MGM.

The major features Ahern and Grenade have in common are that both went to BYU and both started at Walt Disney Studios in the same year — 1955.

Both have worked in live-action films, but Grenade has been in more of that type of entertainment than Ahern, whose background in animation is more extensive. In fact, at one time, Ahern introduced animation into a live film, "Boy and the Eagle," when the producers reached an impasse. "They couldn't figure out how to stage a fight of eagles," he said. "I suggested they do animation. They scoffed at me. I told them I would do it for nothing if it didn't work. I did the animation of the eagle fight; it was popular and I got paid."

Grenade has been in such movies as "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" and he was in the Utah-made film, "Red Canyon," before he went into animation.

Ahern has made ski and adventure films in many parts of Utah and Canada. He actually has his name on more than 600

films, such as the Disney productions, "Mary Poppins," "101 Dalmatians," "Jungle Book" and "Sleeping Beauty." He also was head of production at Hanna-Barbera in Hollywood and before moving to Orem held that position for Taft-Ruby and Spears, a production company in Hollywood.

Grenade has moved from animator to sound effects director to voices. He was one of the voices for "Lady and the Tramp," which he says "was a lot of fun."

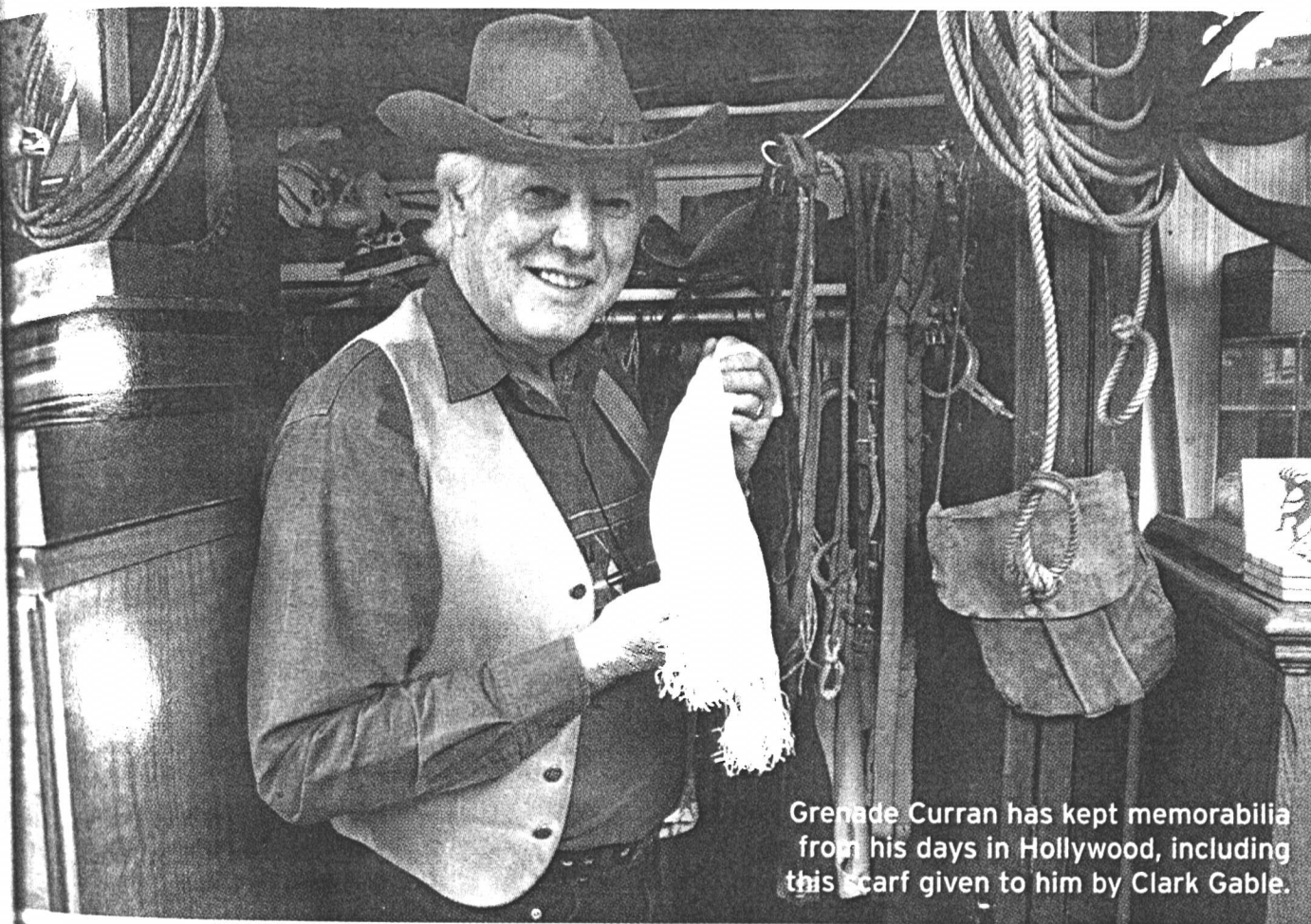
A person cannot interview Grenade without asking about his first name. He'll tell you it's a French name that has such derivatives as grenadier. His discussion of his first name becomes like a lesson in word derivation.

Ahern and Curran have some unusual comments to make about television. The latter calls it "a great sponge," which could mean something to his advantage because this means there is a big demand for animators. Ahern says there are not enough producers to make shows that are needed today, but he says he could not agree with the demands for R and X movies.

He refused to work for a studio that wanted him to work on films of that type, so four years ago he quit and went into production of his own, winding up with the studio that is now in Orem.

Ahern and Curran are surrounded by reminders of their days with Hanna-Barbera and Disney — celluloid frames containing drawings of pictures in which they were involved, like "Lady and the Tramp" and "Sleeping Beauty." In one corner of one office is a drawing desk from the Disney studio where Walt might have dashed off a few lines to show an animator what he wanted.

The two producers are expanding their offices to take in the whole building in Viewmont Plaza in Orem. They easily could become No. 2 animators in the country. They believe they are now just behind Hanna-Barbera and Disney.



Grenade Curran has kept memorabilia from his days in Hollywood, including this scarf given to him by Clark Gable.

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not let someone else to offer me a cigarette," Grenade says. "He didn't want me to lose the standard of goodness that I stood for. I stood of my own conviction, my own choice."

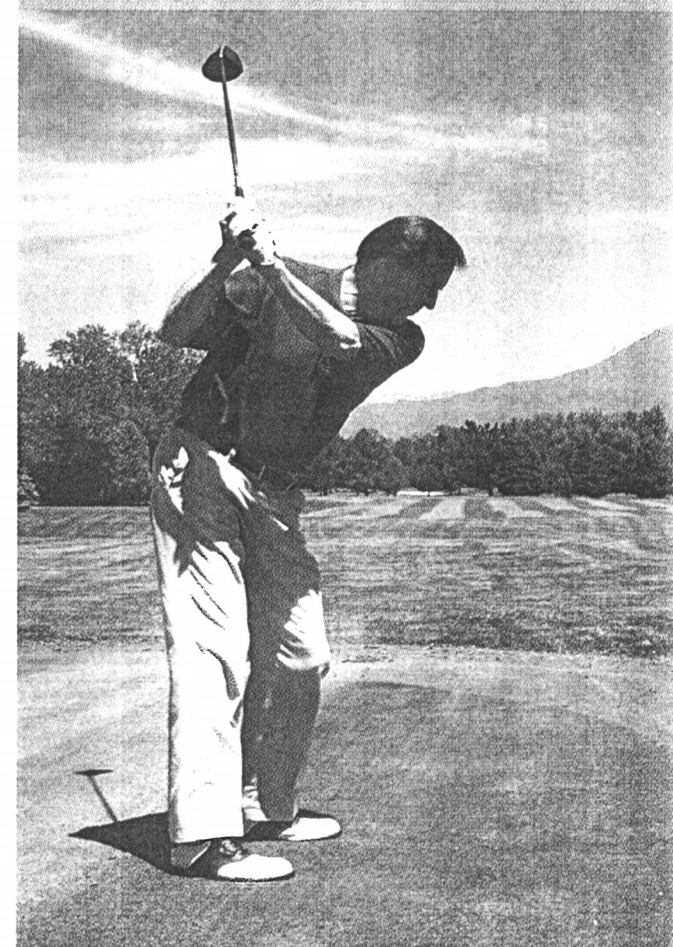
He turned down \$500,000 (equivalent to more than \$3 million in today's dollars) in the late 1950s to be the Marlboro Man, one of the first models, he says he was offered but refused because he didn't want to compromise his standards.

1965, he graduated with a double major in motion picture/television and public relations/advertising.

Soon after graduation, Grenade was back in Hollywood, where he worked behind the camera on films like "Major Dundee," "The Professionals" and "Planet of the Apes." He also produced a small independent film, "Ransom Money," in 1969.

"I did acting, behind-the-scenes, wardrobes, props, stunts — everything," Grenade says.

We've rolled out the green carpet.



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